



# The Sea Ice is Our Highway: The Importance of Sea Ice to the Inuit Way of Life

Circumpolar Indigenous Peoples Working Group  
UNESCO International Experts Meeting

3-6 March 2009, Monaco

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# The Historical Importance of Sea Ice to Inuit

- Inuit are a marine people
- Inuit communities are located on the coast or major waterways to the sea
- Land use and occupancy – Sea ice has always been an extension of Inuit land



Full Extent of Inuit Land Use (in Northwest Territories only).  
Source: Inuit Land Use and Occupancy Project, 1976.

Despite the increased difficulty in finding and harvesting big game and sea mammals due to thinning and less predictable sea ice, Inuit communities are persistent in maintaining their traditional diets.

“The majority of my food I still get from the land, I still depend on all the fish that we get and different ways to prepare it. Whale meat and seal meat, geese.”

Frank Pokiak, Inuvialuit Settlement Region, March 2008.



Moving to Follow the Game:  
Continued Importance of  
Traditional Diet



- Hunting for subsistence requires a great deal of movement
- Inuit follow the animals as far as needed in each season
- Though many Inuit in Canada now use snowmobiles instead of dog teams, we are still out on the land and sea, travelling as far as needed to seek out the wildlife we rely on for subsistence.

## The Sea Ice is Our Highway

Life in the Arctic is dependent on movement, and sea ice is integral to that movement.

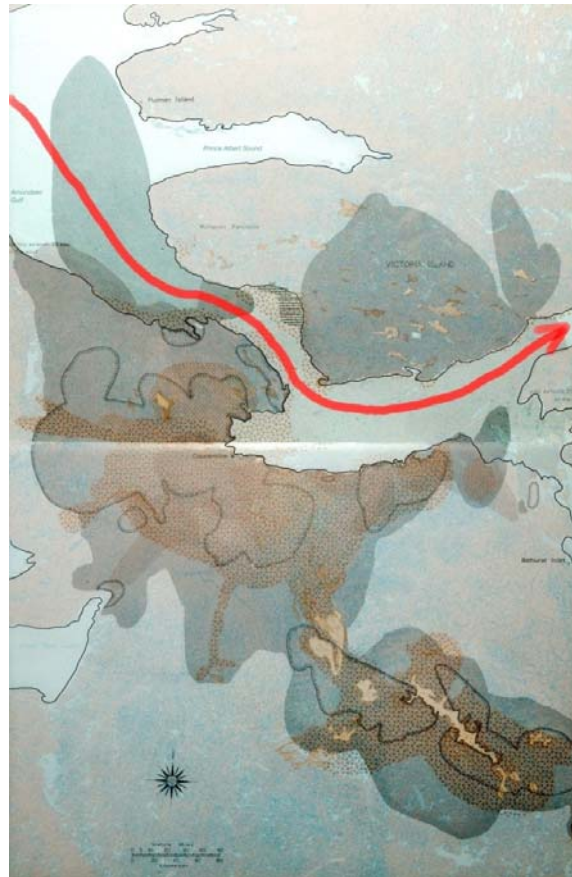




## Recommendation #1: Regulate Arctic Navigation

Strict regulation is needed to protect water and air purity.

Special navigation routes and seasons are needed to protect wildlife habitat and migration patterns.



This map illustrates how a Northwest Passage shipping route passes through traditional Inuit territory.

Kugluktuk region, Nunavut.  
Map source: Inuit Land Use and Occupancy Project, 1976.



## Recommendation #2: Support Inuit Adaptation

Inuit are creative, courageous, and determined to adapt as we have adapted for millennia.

But we need support to meet the challenges of climate change in ways that suit our unique culture.

Quotes from Inuit hunters interviewed in March 2008:

*“Then we'll use other equipment. People will still hunt. It's part of our life. When things change, you just have to go with it.”*

*“I'm still going to depend on harvesting, different species if it has to be... You just change with the changes, I guess... As long as I'm alive I'll keep doing what I'm doing.”*

*“A buddy of mine is into making little sleds out of aluminum, which you can use as a little kayak or boat. It's combined as a little sleigh and, if you have to, you can use it as a boat. That's one way I can adapt.”*





## Recommendation #3: Continue Climate Change Mitigation Efforts

Climate change is now on the global political agenda in preparation for Copenhagen.

For the sake of our children, let us remain hopeful and continue our efforts.





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